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UNCLAS VATICAN 006141

SIPDIS

2ND C O R R E C T E D COPY (ADDED ADDRESSEE(S), PARAS RENUMBERED)

STATE FOR SCIENCE ADVISOR NEUREITER
EUR/ERA FOR HEN-NIL
EB FOR CEKUTA AND SCHONANDER
OES
STATE PASS USDA FOR APHIS:SMCCAMMON, USDA/FAS:BLUM
USDA/FAS/ITT:EJONES, USDA/FAS/OA:SLUTSKY
USDA/OS/HEGWOOD

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STATE PASS FDA FOR EFLAMM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SENV](#) [ETRD](#) [TBIO](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES VATICAN DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES
FOR SUPPORT ON AFRICAN FAMINE AND BIOTECH FEARS

1. SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR HOSTED A MEETING ON THE AFRICA FAMINE AND U.S. BIOTECH RELIEF FOOD DECEMBER 18 FOR THIRTY HOLY SEE DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES FROM EUROPE, AFRICA, ASIA, AND LATIN AMERICA. WORLD FOOD PROGRAM DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JEAN JACQUES GRAISSE, U.S. AMBASSADOR TO FODAG TONY HALL, AND ITALIAN GENETICIST FROM THE ITALIAN NATIONAL RESEARCH CENTER IN NAPLES DR. ROBERTO DEFEZ BRIEFED THE HOLY SEE AMBASSADORS ON THE STATE OF THE AFRICAN FAMINE AND URGED THEM TO WORK BOTH WITH THEIR CAPITALS AND WITH THE HOLY SEE TO DEVELOP MORE HUMANITARIAN RELIEF. ALL PRESENTERS, INCLUDING AMBASSADOR NICHOLSON, OFFERED CLEAR AND COMPELLING COMMENTARY ON THE NEED TO DO MORE TO RESPOND TO THIS CRISIS AND EMPHASIZED THE SAFETY OF US FOOD. END SUMMARY.

2. WFP DEPUTY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JEAN JACQUES GRAISSE LAID OUT THE FOOD NEEDS FOR AFRICA OVER THE COMING MONTHS, FOCUSING ON THE FOLLY OF REFUSING TO ACCEPT "COMPLETELY SAFE" U.S. FOOD. HE TERMED THIS "THE MOST ABSURD SITUATION" HE HAD SEEN IN A CAREER OF RELIEF WORK. AMBASSADOR HALL REVIEWED HIS RECENT MISSION TO AFRICA AND URGED THE AMBASSADORS TO GET THEIR GOVERNMENTS TO STEP UP THEIR ASSISTANCE LEVELS, BOTH OF COMMODITIES AND OF CASH. HE UNDERScoreD THE MORAL ISSUES AT HAND, AND NOTED THAT HOW

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POLITICAL LEADERS RESPOND -- BOTH IN FAMINE-STRUCK COUNTRIES AND DONOR COUNTRIES, WILL BE HELD IN JUDGMENT BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. DR. DEFEZ' PRESENTATION UNDERScoreD BOTH THE RELATIVE AND ABSOLUTE SAFETY OF BIOTECH FOODS WHEN COMPARED TO CONVENTIONAL AND ORGANIC FOODS. DEFEZ ALSO EXPLAINED THE ENVIRONMENTAL INNOCUOUSNESS OF BIOTECH CROPS, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS "WEAK COMPETITORS IN A NATURAL ENVIRONMENT."

3. THE HOLY SEE AMBASSADORS' COMMENTS WERE GENERALLY POSITIVE, WITH THE GERMAN AMBASSADOR NOTING THAT THE AFRICAN FAMINE HAS SEIZED THE ATTENTION OF THE EU, WHICH WILL DEVOTE OVER 100 MILLION EURO TO IT IN COMING MONTHS. THE GREEK AMBASSADOR QUESTIONED WHETHER AFRICAN OPPOSITION TO US FOOD WAS "POLITICAL" (WE TOLD HIM IT WAS ROOTED IN FEAR OF EU REACTIONS, NOT FEAR THAT THE FOOD WAS AMERICAN). CANADIAN AMBASSADOR LICARI, AN OLD AFRICA HAND, EXPRESSED HIS COUNTRY'S FRUSTRATION WITH THE ZAMBIAN GOVERNMENT'S DECISION TO REFUSE US FOOD ASSISTANCE, BUT TOLD THE ASSEMBLED GUESTS THAT MORE AFRICAN VOICES NEEDED TO BE HEARD. HE SAID THE US NEEDED TO ENGAGE IN A MORE EFFECTIVE "INFORMATION CAMPAIGN" TO EDUCATE AFRICAN LEADERS ABOUT US FOOD. THE DUTCH AMBASSADOR'S WIFE LATER REPORTED TO MRS. NICHOLSON THAT HER HUSBAND THOUGHT THE MEETING WAS THE MOST MEANINGFUL TWO HOURS HE HAD SPENT IN HIS ENTIRE DIPLOMATIC CAREER.

4. COMMENT: IN BRINGING TOGETHER THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, WE HAVE SOUGHT TO STIMULATE OUR DIPLOMATIC COLLEAGUES TO GREATER AWARENESS AND ACTIVITY VIS-A-VIS THE AFRICA FAMINE AND STEP UP INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE ON THE HOLY SEE TO

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ABANDON THE CAUTION THAT HAS CHARACTERIZED ITS POSITION ON THE SAFETY OF US FOOD ASSISTANCE TO DATE. MOST OF THE AMBASSADORS/CHARGES TOOK DETAILED NOTES, AND MANY INDICATED THEY WOULD REPORT U.S. CONCERNS BACK TO CAPITALS. WE HAVE PRESSED AND WILL CONTINUE TO PRESS THE DEAN OF THE VATICAN DIPLOMATIC CORPS (FROM SAN MARINO) TO MAKE THIS ISSUE A THEME OF HIS ANNUAL GREETING TO THE POPE ON JANUARY 13. THE POPE'S RESPONSE, WHICH IS PICKED UP BY MEDIA ALL OVER THE WORLD, COULD VERY WELL PROVIDE AMMUNITION TO USE WITH BISHOPS CONFERENCES AND OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE CHURCH THAT

HAVE BEEN UNHELPFUL ON THE BIOTECH MESSAGE IN RECENT
MONTHS.
NICHOLSON

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